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ABSTRACT

This bulletin describes the growing Adopt-a-School Movement, a grass-roots initiative by the public schools' external constituencies to assist financially and materially either an individual school or an entire school system to design educationally enriching programs. Examples are given of banks, major corporations, local businesses, foundations, colleges, the military, and civic groups who work with individual schools and school systems to provide children with job-related skills so that one day they may enter the labor force and contribute to the economy. (JAM)

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The Burgeoning Adopt-a-School Movement

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By Story Moorefield

The Adopt-a-School movement has been around long enough now that it seems here to stay, and for the participating schools it's like getting a healthy boost in their budgets and adding some zesty experts to the staff.

Although many schools do not seem to have heard of the Adopt-a-School concept—at least they are not participating—it is a national undertaking now, with adopters including major corporations, local businesses, colleges, foundations, government agencies, the military, churches, civic groups, unions, and many more. Though now national in its impact, Adopt-a-School is a grass-roots initiative that has spread and prospered simply because it works.

In many cases a single entity in the community—a local business firm, perhaps, or maybe a civic organization or a club—adopts a single school. The recent trend, however, has been toward the adoption of an overall school system, and some of the larger school districts have attracted some really big-ticket adopters. The Bank of Boston, for example, gave that city's schools $1.5 million for a permanent endowment fund to promote school excellence, and American Airlines awarded $500,000 for the same general purpose to schools in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Most of the districtwide adoptions, however, involve the combined contributions—in money, goods, and services—of a number of local businesses, civic groups, community organizations, colleges, and other donors.

Dallas is incidentally where the Adopt-a-School concept seems to have started, back in 1969. It subsequently garnered national attention when President Reagan proclaimed 1983-84 as the National Year of Partnerships in Education and called on the private sector to make a structured and sustained commitment to helping strengthen America's schools. The momentum has been building ever since.

Today nearly every type of enterprise in the nation has formed partnerships with local schools: Advertising agencies, banks, churches, civic groups, colleges, insurance companies, manufacturing firms, police departments, sports teams . . . you name it. Even the Nevada gambling casinos have joined the cause, as have several agencies of the U.S. government. The Postal Service is deeply involved, for example, and a wide variety of Army, Navy, and Air Force units are working with public schools near military bases throughout the country. The White House itself adopted the Martin Luther King, Jr., Elementary School in the nation's capital.

The U.S. Department of Education has in fact set up an Office of Private Sector Initiatives to keep track of participants in an umbrella operation it calls Partnerships in Education. The Adopt-a-School program is an example of such a partnership. Others involve not the formal "adoption" of a school but the provision of auxiliary benefits ranging from teacher training and teacher incentive awards to student work-study opportunities and curriculum development assistance. The Department of Education estimates that there are now about 50,000

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PIE arrangements.

Many colleges and universities have stopped their traditional bemoaning about how poorly prepared their entering freshmen are and have instead committed themselves to doing something about it via the Adopt-a-School concept. Thus the American Association for Higher Education reports that a 1987 survey showed more than 1,000 partnerships between institutions of higher education and school districts or individual schools. Colleges and universities tend to work mostly with high schools rather than elementary and middle schools, toward preparing more young people to take on college-level work. Similarly, private corporations have tended to focus on the specific goal of preparing more students to hold down jobs, and that, too, means working with high school students.

In recent years, however, colleges and corporations and other adopters have started taking a longer view, on the premise that to assure a steady, continuous flow of well-prepared college entrants and potential employees, the focus should be not so much on remedying problems as on assuring children stimulating, effective educational experiences from the early grades on up. Thus thousands of sponsors are now seeking to enrich education in elementary and middle schools, and currently an increasing number also are seeking to assure appropropriate *pre*-school experiences.

A typical school-college partnership is that between Augusta College in Augusta, Georgia, and that city's Joseph R. Lamar Elementary School. Toward helping Lamar teachers broaden their instructional skills and acquire new ones, professors from the college conduct frequent workshops in such areas as how to teach reading or mathematics or science, or how to deal with classroom-induced stress. Meanwhile, mathematics and English students from the college tutor Lamar youngsters in multiplication and reading; and Augusta psychology students assist the Lamar faculty in counseling pupils with behavioral problems.

The Augusta program posits that the elementary grades are not too early to get children thinking about college, and to show them what life is like in an institution of higher learning, Lamar students are invited to many on-campus events. These include the annual Honors Program, which each May salutes academic achievement, and those saluted include outstanding students not just from the college but from Lamar as well.

A New York partnership created the city's first middle school anti-dropout program.

Now move 800 miles or so north to New York City, where Queens College began a partnership with the Louis Armstrong Middle School when this innovative magnet school (grades 5-8) opened in 1979. Over the years since then the college has worked with the Louis Armstrong principal David A. Brown and his faculty and staff to develop a range of curriculum projects and to deal with various operational matters, including the development of a dropout prevention program that was the city's first for middle school students.

The dropout prevention program offers both remedial instruction and one-on-one help with homework, so that the students (most are from disadvantaged and minority families) will not feel overwhelmed by school and give up. The program includes group counseling to combat children's feelings of incompetence and inability to control their own lives, and gives students work-study experiences—after-school jobs at LaGuardia Airport, for example, and in the offices of cooperating local legislators—toward helping them understand what is involved in being employed.

To reinforce the program, the college conducts stress-control workshops designed to help parents, especially single parents, learn how to handle the pressures in their own lives so they can deal more effectively with the pressures that confront their children.

Now move west about 500 miles to where Eastern Michigan University is helping to deal with the dropout situation by working with youngsters in the elementary grades, and not just in one school but in many. The basic instrument in this effort is a consortium the university has formed with the Detroit, Flint, Lansing, Pontiac, and Saginaw school districts. The first goal was to identify those children in all of the inner-city elementary schools in the five locations who were deemed to be "at risk" of becoming dropouts. With these children having been identified, the consortium arrangement calls for giving them intensive instruction in the basic skills plus activities designed to provide emotional support—with university students serving as tutors and mentors—in the expectation of simultaneously raising both test scores and self-confidence.

Many creative partnerships come about through formal proposals submitted to prospective sponsors by school districts interested in being "adopted." Sometimes, however, they are spontaneous, generated because someone had a good idea, saw an opportunity, and seized it.

Cos Renzi, principal of the Timber Lane Elementary School in Virginia's Fairfax county, saw such an opportu-

nity for his school in the fall of 1985 when he attended a county principals meeting on the nearby Annandale campus of Northern Virginia Community College. In addressing the meeting, Barbara Holmes, the college's provost, invited the principals to use Northern Virginia's facilities, programs, and staff to further the academic objectives of their schools and perhaps to improve the students' motivation. Renzi decided on the spot to accept, and after the meeting he sought Holmes out. A partnership was born.

As at Augusta College, the Timber Lane adoption involves opening up a vision of higher education. Given their backgrounds, it is not likely that many of these youngsters would have such a dream on their own: They come from more than 40 countries; many speak no English; half are black, Asian, or Hispanic; fully one-third are disadvantaged. And on top of everything else, they are highly transient; about 50 percent of the pupils in the school today will be someplace else a year hence.

Under the agreement between the school and the college, Northern Virginia faculty go to Timber Lane to work with the youngsters there. One professor showed sixth graders his slides of Egypt, Greece, and Italy and talked with them about the early civilizations that flourished there. A physics instructor and some of his advanced students counseled the Timber Laners as they prepared an exhibit for an upcoming science fair, and other students from the college presented an assembly program highlighted by experiments aimed at reinforcing the principles of the scientific method. Meanwhile the provost and college faculty members have sought out parents, at PTA meetings and elsewhere, to encourage *them* to take advantage of the resources of the college to upgrade job skills and their proficiency with English.

Of the various activities that have resulted from the partnership, those that have most deeply impressed the Timber Lane students have involved trips to the college campus. On one occasion they were introduced to the importance of oral hygiene when they were on campus to have their teeth cleaned. However, Renzi recalls, what they found most memorable was not the visit to the dental clinic but having lunch in the college cafeteria. Seeing the college students informally chatting with each other over lunch, he said, or perhaps studying at the lunch table—in general, being "at home"—somehow had a profound effect.

Adopters range from clubs and local shops to numerous "Fortune 500" corporations.

Renzi feels that one important key to the partnership's success is the existence of a standing committee—composed of members of the faculty from both institutions—that sets goals and priorities, seeks suggestions and reactions from parents and students, sees to it that planned activities are managed properly, and maintains a running evaluation of how things are going.

Move southwest now to Memphis, Tennessee, to see an example of a school district that has mobilized just about the entire community—190 adopters for the city's 157 schools. The 190 includes several "*Fortune* 500" companies (Boise Cascade, Ford Motor Company, General Electric, Honeywell, Kraft Foods, IBM, McDonald's, Polaroid, Ralston Purina, Sears, and Xerox), but most sponsors are such local organizations as banks, department stores, hospitals, senior citizens groups, churches, and the like.

The Memphis program dates from 1979, when the district's superintendent told members of the community that if they really wanted to strengthen the schools, the most effective way of doing so would be to get tangibly involved in them. District officials today say that while the financial assistance the schools receive is important, at least equally valuable is the personal commitment that thousands of members of the community now make to Memphis's children.

Take, for example, the members of the Temple Israel Sisterhood, who volunteered to tutor all of the vision-impaired pupils from all of the city's elementary schools. The ladies also transcribe lesson workbooks into Braille to make it easier for these youngsters to do their homework. During summer vacation the sisters offer a program of individual tutoring; and since they believe that summer should also be a time for fun for youngsters, the ladies drive them to various points of interest in the nearby outlying areas (a chicken farm proved especially popular). And for another example of the value of commitment, consider the city's Manor Lane Elementary School, which has been adopted by the Memphis facility of the U.S. Postal Service. School officials say that the reading levels of Manor Lane students tutored by postal employees jumped two grades in a single semester.

Up in Hartford, Connecticut, the Aetna Life and Casualty Company has chosen not exactly to adopt a school but to create one—called the Saturday Academy—in cooperation with the Hartford Board of Education. The Saturday Academy offers

selected public school seventh graders in inner-city neighborhoods a special enrichment program in mathematics, science, oral and written communications, and computer literacy. Designed for students already performing at grade level, the program helps to anchor them scholastically and emotionally before they confront the pressures of high school and the temptations of dropping out. It has this novel feature: A parent or other responsible adult in the life of each participating student must attend at least four of the nine Saturday mornings sessions each semester.

Aetna picks up most of the program costs. The Board of Education cooperates by providing bus transportation and allowing middle school teachers to conduct the Saturday classes, with Aetna paying their salaries.

The Saturday Academy uses an interdisciplinary approach, often combining all four academic priorities—mathematics, science, written and oral communications, and computer literacy—into a single instructional unit. A typical unit is called "A Trip to Mars." In a hypothetical spaceship the students use math to calculate how much cargo to stow, how much fuel will be needed, and how long the voyage to the Red Planet will take. In performing most of the calculations the students use their classroom computers and thus become computer literate. Science comes into play as the students study the atmosphere and geology of Mars, and decide what sort of terrain might support a colony of Earthlings. The experience also involves making written and oral reports, thus sharpening their communications skills. As a next step, Aetna and the Board of Education are now developing a longitudinal evaluation study that will follow Saturday Academy graduates through high school to measure the program's impact on subsequent academic performance.

Now travel to Dallas Independent School District, which is often credited with having invented the Adopt-a-School concept and which was in any event using it a decade before it caught on nationally. That was in 1969, when the city's economy was booming but its schools seemed to need help. School officials sent out an SOS asking the private sector to lend a helping hand.

In Dallas, where it all started, there are now over 1900 sponsors and 15,000 volunteers.

The Dallas business community responded with generous support—as did government agencies, colleges, churches, youth and senior citizens groups, and numerous individuals—and although Texas has suffered an economic turndown in recent years, support for the Adopt-a-School idea continues to grow. In school year 1986-87 no less than 1,900 sponsors contributed money, equipment, and services valued at $6.1 million. Of that total, $2.2 million represented man-hours donated by some 15,000 volunteers.

By now Dallas has developed a really awesome organizational structure to undergird its Adopt-a-School activities, with the Greater Dallas Chamber of Commerce taking the lead in coordinating support from the private sector. The Chamber works hard on getting participating companies to continue their support and encouraging new firms to join the team. It is not to be wondered at that President Reagan recently gave the Chamber a Private Sector Initiative Award for the quality and level of business participation in Dallas's drive for educational excellence.

While the Chamber plays a crucial role in the Dallas program, it is only a part of the Dallas Adopt-a-School management team. Goals and priorities are established by a governing body called the Community Network for Public Education, which is coordinated by the school district and composed of task forces that seek to enhance the involvement of business firms, colleges and universities, private education, civic groups, parent-teacher associations, and the religious community. In addition the network has advisory committees assigned to focus on the particular educational needs of blacks, Native American, Asian American, Hispanic, and handicapped children.

Nowhere else have the public schools and the military set up a partnership quite like that between the Navy and the San Diego County school system. With its superb harbor, San Diego is home port to one-fifth of the Navy fleet and its Marine Corps contingent, making it the largest military complex in the free world. As such, the Navy establishment is one of San Diego's largest employers and is a major force in the economy of the entire region.

It is also a major force in the San Diego Adopt-a-School program. Of the 400 current adoptions, no less than 45 are commitments by the Navy, representing some 30 commands based in that area. As a typical example of the kind of thing the Navy is doing, in the county's Chula Vista school district it operates a Saturday Scholars program in which Navy volunteers, on their own time, tutor youngsters in grades four through six in mathematics and reading. Chula Vista school officials say the program has raised the achievement levels of these youngsters—in

both subjects—by three, four, and in some cases five years.

More generally, members of crews from Navy ships, again on their own time, regularly visit their adopted schools to talk with students about matters ranging from the professional and technical careers opening up to young people in the Navy to the importance of physical fitness and good nutrition. In return, adopted schools regularly invite Navy personnel to various school events, prominently including graduation.

The Navy also has put its construction expertise at the service of some of the adopted schools. For example, volunteers designed and built playground equipment for disabled students, and have devised and installed electronic switches that enable severely handicapped children to turn on TVs and radios and the like. One group upgraded an adopted middle school's computer lab and installed an additional telephone line.

For many students, the great gray vessels lying at anchor in the harbor have provided a particularly strong motivation to excel in school. Students with outstanding achievement records get to visit their school sponsor's ship, and as a memento of the occasion receive Navy caps with the ship's insignia on the brim. Three youngsters from Kimball Elementary School, where most students come from low-income, minority families, hit the jackpot. Chosen by their school for academic excellence, they were flown to Hawaii at the expense of crew members of the school's adopter, the USS Cape Cod, a destroyer tender. After a tour of the islands, they returned to San Diego on board the Cape Cod itself, a rare treat for any civilian.

All in all, it's no wonder that Thomas C. Boysen, San Diego County's superintendent of schools, says "We really are very fortunate to have the Navy as a partner."

Up the California coast 100 miles or so lies the town of Irvine, and though its Adopt-a-School sponsors do not include the U.S. Navy, it, too, conducts a highly successful program. Moreover, the school people there have put together a *Partnerships in Education Handbook* that provides tips for other school systems that would like to follow suit.

First and foremost, the Irvine people say, the school district should appoint an Adopt-a-School Director who has no other duties. A big, demanding, complex job is involved, they say, and it can't be handled on a part-time basis. One basic aspect of that job is of course to recruit adopters, and that means enlisting a wide variety of organizations, getting participation from all segments of the community, helping the participating organizations identify resources that they can offer and that the schools need, and working with adopters as they get acquainted with their schools.

In the Adopt-a-School movement, both sides have a lot to gain—and so does the nation.

The Adopt-a-School director is also responsible for all public relations activities—such basic literature as brochures and fact sheets, presentations at conferences and other meetings, PTA briefings, and contacts with the press and TV and radio, perhaps including arranging for cable TV coverage of important partnership events. When a school district begins to acquire multiple partners, the PR aspect of the job alone can become a very tall order.

Similarly each school that becomes adopted needs to appoint its own partnership coordinator (not on a full-time basis, of course); and the coordinator must maintain constant liaison with the adopting organization, beginning with providing a prioritized list of the school's needs, from particular kinds of volunteer-provided skills to particular equipment and facilities. In addition, the sponsor should be given a "profile" of the school—a detailed description of the school's operations and goals and accomplishments, its enrollment patterns, how it is organized, the makeup of the staff, the curriculum and related aspects of the educational program, the school-year calendar, honors that have been won, and above all a summary of how the school sees its mission and what it feels must be done in order to achieve that mission. It is also a good idea to invite leaders of the sponsoring group to a "get-acquainted" meeting at which they take a tour of the school and have an opportunity to talk with students, the staff, and members of the PTA. There might even be a lunch in the school cafeteria. At any rate, it's a good idea to show such visitors what school is like nowadays.

The handbook notes that certain things also are expected of sponsors, beginning with the appointment of a partnership coordinator who stays in constant touch with the school and *its* coordinator. The company needs to provide the school with a company profile; a list of people who would be interested in volunteering to work with the school, together with the special skills they can offer; and perhaps an explanation of company resources that the school could capitalize on. For example, a computer manufacturing company might provide its adopted school with some of its desk-top computers, send instructors to train teachers in their use, supply some instructional videotapes, and

offer the students and staff tours of its manufacturing plant.

The handbook advises a series of exploratory meetings between representatives of the sponsor and the school, leading toward the mutual development of a comprehensive plan of action and ultimately to the signing of a formal one-year partnership agreement. Details of the commitment are worked out by the two coordinators, who also monitor and manage its day-to-day implementation. At the end of the year they draw up an evaluation report, for review by leaders of the sponsoring organization and the school, and establish goals for the year ahead.

The Adopt-a-School movement would appear to be not just another novel and transitory wrinkle in education, a fad, but to mark the emergence of a new and distinctly American relationship between public schools and the communities they serve. The development of that relationship has not occurred simply by accident but because it serves some important purposes. One of those purposes is to help children become happier, more purposeful, more fulfilled adults.

That would be reason enough why so many national corporations, local business firms, public and private agencies, individuals, and others have pitched in. But there are also some practical reasons why the Adopt-a-School movement has caught on so firmly, among them being the fact that it is helping to produce a stronger America. In providing enriched school experiences for our children, it serves such national purposes as helping to create

- A better-trained, more flexible, more productive work force
- A strong, stable tax base for the community and in the long run for the nation
- A healthy, vigorous national economy
- A strong, alert national defense
- A far keener and stronger edge in the increasingly intense international competition for markets.

Clearly, for the various large and small companies involved, adopting a school is not just public-spirited. It is also good business.

As for the schools, they have much to gain, too. They get expert volunteers and expert counsel for their programs, and extra funds to make the school's programs even stronger. Moreover, they form some invaluable alliances. When you are in particular need of public support—when it comes time for a school bond issue, for example, or when a crisis arises—it is mighty comforting to reflect that the community's movers and shakers know what your school is trying to accomplish and have a stake in your success—that they are in fact partners in your endeavor.

Copies of the *Partnership in Education Handbook* are available from Barbara Barnes, Director, Partnerships in Education, 17748 Sky Park Circle, Irvine, CA 92717, telephone 714/261-6864.

To help interested officials learn more about successful partnerships, the federal Department of Education offers a computer printout directory of Adopt-a-School and related programs, listed by state and county and with the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of responsible persons. It is titled *Programs of Private Sector Initiatives in Education,* and copies may be obtained from the Office of Private Sector Initiatives, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20202, telephone 202/732-3060.

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